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Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction

Measures to eliminate international terrorism

Letter dated 21 November 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith the transcript of the press conference given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque (see annex), in which he refuted the false statements made by the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Mr. Otto Reich, who had accused Cuba of trying to develop biological weapons and obstruct efforts to combat international terrorism.

I should be grateful if you could have the text of this letter and its annex circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 72 and 160, and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bruno **Rodríguez Parrilla**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 21 November 2002 from the Permanent Representative of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Transcript of the press conference given by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba, Mr. Felipe Pérez Roque, concerning statements made by the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, Mr. Otto Reich, accusing Cuba of producing biological weapons

Date and place: 1 November 2002, 2.10 p.m., Ministry of Foreign Affairs

I have called you here so that I can comment on the statements made by Mr. Otto Reich, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs. There is no way that Mr. Reich will let us, and those in the United States and in Cuba who are working to establish relations, work in peace.

Let me start by saying what those statements were.

I have a cable here from Agence France Presse that reads as follows: "The senior official for Latin American affairs in the United States Government, Otto Reich, repeated this Thursday the accusation that Cuba is trying to develop biological weapons". It cites Mr. Reich as saying: "I repeat this because [three] U. S. officials ... have made the statement and yet the first reaction of some of the people in the press is to say 'We don't believe it'". Not exactly some people, because no one believed it. Saying that he was repeating the statement because three others had made it and the reaction had been one of disbelief, Reich went on: "Three — four, now — U. S. officials have made this statement that Cuba has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort, and we base this on information that we have".

Mr. Reich can be said to have made three accusations against Cuba. First: "Cuba has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort".

Second: "Cuba has engaged in a deliberate effort to confuse, distract and divert U. S. intelligence from its vital counter-terrorism mission by dangling false leads".

In these two assertions he somehow repeats and mixes, adding a little of his own in a kind of mendacious cocktail, statements made by other State Department officials.

He then adds a third accusation: "You may have heard the Government of Cuba deny its responsibility for this assault on our first line of defense against terror" — listen to this — "for this assault on our first line of defense against terror. Today I can tell you that Cuba's hostile campaign against our intelligence agencies continues even now".

For its part, the Notimex press agency, noting that the Assistant Secretary is of Cuban extraction, reports that in a speech to the conservative non-governmental organization the Heritage Foundation, Otto Reich said that "Cuba is a State sponsor of terrorism. We believe that Cuba has, quote, 'at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort'".

Here, Notimex brings us an interesting point saying that on 5 June 2002, the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs demolished the United States Government's claim that Cuba was building chemical and biological weapons by asking for proof from the State Department that was never forthcoming. In other words, the Senate Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs had already shown that the accusation was groundless, and Notimex reports that Senator Christopher Dodd said at the time that he hoped the Bush Administration would refrain from the temptation to play politics with unsubstantiated claims.

However, according to the Notimex cable I have here, Reich — obviously a stubborn man — stood by his accusation, although he did add that he had been briefed that Cuba's biological warfare research and development capability was very difficult to find. He said you could move whatever you were doing within one hour and you could develop chemical and biological agents for good purposes — the manufacture of medicines, for instance — that could very quickly be turned into weapons.

I don't really know, there's no information, no evidence, whether the Assistant Secretary of State passed eighth grade biology and chemistry or whether he knows enough about this to hold forth on the subject, but he says he has proof, he has reports, based on his detailed knowledge of the subject.

All right. Here we have a third dispatch, from Reuters, saying that a senior State Department official, meaning Mr. Reich, repeated on Thursday his accusation that Cuba had developed weapons of mass destruction and complained that some people in the press did not believe the accusation. This is something of an understatement, because I know of no one who believed it, nor anyone in the press who supported the idea.

"Cuba has at least a limited offensive biological warfare research and development effort", Reuters quotes Mr. Reich as saying. "Cuba is a State sponsor of terror", he is quoted as saying. "Cuba is a state sponsor of terror".... He said he couldn't give more information because it was an intelligence matter; but that it was very difficult to find physical evidence because the weapons could be moved from one room to another within one hour. People could run from one room to another with a panful of biological weapons, so it was very difficult to provide evidence.

This, basically, was what Mr. Otto Reich said yesterday in a lecture at the Heritage Foundation and this then is what has forced us to call you here today to give our opinion.

What is our response on the subject?

Mr. Reich, who, as we know, has his own agenda, his personal agenda within the Government and his own well-defined interests with which everyone is familiar, is lying shamelessly. He is lying without any shame at all. Everyone will realize that these statements that I have just finished reading can only be described as a bare-faced lie, and this is what we are saying and what forces me to actually accuse Mr. Otto Reich, the Assistant Secretary of State, of being a liar.

I know that is a harsh thing to say, but I think it is what is called for in a situation like this and I challenge him to prove me wrong. I challenge him to prove that he is not lying. I challenge him to show public opinion that he is not a liar when he repeatedly accuses Cuba so falsely.

I call upon him, I call upon Mr. Otto Reich to present the slightest evidence, the smallest bit of proof to substantiate his accusations against Cuba and the allegations that our country has a biological weapons programme, which I reject and deny categorically, and that our country is obstructing United States efforts to investigate terrorism, which I also reject and categorically deny, as I do his last assertion, that we are doing so right now. So I challenge him to come forward, right now, with evidence. Let him come forward tomorrow and say: "Here is the evidence that the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cuba requested". Just that. I call upon him to do this and not to justify himself by talking about things that can be moved from one room to another. Let him produce the slightest evidence.

This is our response to his disrespectful statements about Cuba. Now, I think we must say this clearly: Mr. Reich is not only a man who lies, he is a man in the grips of an incurable obsession and that obsession is Cuba. He is a man who lives with the anguish and the complex of an obsession with Cuba. His behaviour, which would be a fit subject for a psychologist or a psychiatrist, has repeatedly pointed to what I would call an obsession.

I have in my hand a diplomatic note that we sent on 10 May 2002. It was not made public, but I will refer to a paragraph of it here. On 10 May, we submitted this note to the United States Interests Section here in Havana. In it, we referred to statements made by Assistant Secretary of State Reich on 6 May 2002, a few days after the attempted fascist coup d'état in Venezuela. He had said a few days after the coup attempt: "We have information that four Cuban planes landed at Maiquetía International Airport, Venezuela, on the morning of April 12, when the result of the change in constitutional order was still in doubt. What they were doing there, what they were carrying, we do not know".

As you will recall, this forced us to deny that assertion publicly and led us to affirm publicly, in a Foreign Ministry statement issued the following day, that it was a downright lie and demonstrated the Assistant Secretary's mendaciousness and ineptitude.

When 48 hours went by without our statement eliciting a response, we submitted this diplomatic note, which read: "Since more than 48 hours have now elapsed since the publication of the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry reiterates its demand to the United States Interests Section that Mr. Reich provide international public opinion with the least shred of evidence that a single Cuban plane landed in Caracas on the morning of April 12". We're still waiting. There was no response. The response was silence.

One could say, "why do you take the Assistant Secretary of State seriously, don't respond to him", but we can't do that because, as the proverb says, "silence is acquiescence" and that would give the impression that we don't attach any importance to this issue. Of course, we give it the importance it warrants, but we believe that international public opinion, United States public opinion, the press and the Cuban people have a right to know the truth and to know the arguments on which we base our accusation.

Assistant Secretary of State Reich is the official in charge of western hemisphere affairs, no less, that's his job, that's what the United States Government pays him to do. Yet you've seen him, everyday he puts on a big show about Cuba or about Venezuela, another of his obsessions. Why is he so concerned about Cuba,

why does he bother slandering Cuba everyday instead of dealing with the western hemisphere which, let it be said in passing, is falling apart without Mr. Reich apparently noticing? We need to ask ourselves why he is doing this. I have to say it's a mystery to me. I already said this is something that belongs more in the realm of psychoanalysis than that of politics and foreign policy issues. We need to find out why he's obsessed with Cuba, and maybe you can help.

I can prove that these recurrent, suspect accusations are something new, in other words, they began only when Mr. Reich took over as Assistant Secretary of State. It wasn't always like this. No, no, no, it wasn't always like this, this is something new. This came about, this issue found its way onto the public agenda and into Cuban-United States relations only when Mr. Reich took office.

I am going to give five examples to prove my point.

First, on 5 March 1998, General Charles Wilhelm, former Commander-in-Chief of the United States Southern Command, an authoritative senior United States military official, in a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing, was asked about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Cuba. He replied that Cuba was under observation and was known to have a biological research and development programme, but that there was no indication that the programme was for military purposes.

Second, the United States Arms Control and Disarmament Agency's 1997 report on the proliferation of biological and toxin weapons singled out eight countries that the United States Government suspected might be developing biological weapons programmes. Cuba was not mentioned anywhere in that report.

Third, a more recent report on chemical and biological threats, published in 2000 by the United States Department of Defense, did not include Cuba among the group of countries that have or are trying to acquire chemical and biological weapons.

Fourth, there is no mention of Cuba in the 2000 report of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to the United States Congress on the acquisition of technology relating to weapons of mass destruction and advanced conventional weapons, a report in which the CIA informs Congress of any concerns and suspicions it might have on the subject.

Lastly, in a report entitled "Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001" released by the State Department on 21 May 2002, the United States classifies other countries of the world and designates some as State sponsors of terrorism. The report makes the arbitrary, politicized and totally unsubstantiated claim that Cuba is one such State, and it tells a number of lies to justify Cuba's inclusion. Among those lies and the accusations and arguments put forward for Cuba's inclusion, there is no mention of biological weapons. In accusing Cuba of sponsoring terrorism, the State Department says absolutely nothing about Cuba allegedly producing biological weapons or obstructing United States counter-terrorism efforts. There is no mention of these issues. So, these five examples show that this is a new campaign that Mr. Reich has suddenly organized so he can raise those issues.

Why didn't the United States ever raise these issues before Mr. Reich took over as Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs? Someone has to answer that question. Why did this suddenly begin when Mr. Reich took office?

Why did Mr. Reich oppose the signing by our two countries of agreements that Cuba has proposed repeatedly, for instance, bilateral agreements establishing cooperation in combating drugs or in tackling illegal emigration and trafficking in persons or agreements setting up a bilateral cooperation programme in the area of counter-terrorism, agreements that were inexplicably rejected? Why did Mr. Reich block progress in these areas which are important to both the people of the United States and the international community?

Why, for instance, did Mr. Reich reject Cuba's offer to cooperate with the United States in conducting research on West Nile Virus? I would like to recall what Cuba said in this regard:

> "The Government of Cuba is prepared to cooperate, to the best of its ability, with the health authorities of the United States and other countries of our hemisphere in the research and efforts needed to tackle this latest threat to public health in the hemisphere, where AIDS, dengue fever and other plagues are, to a lesser or greater extent, already threatening and undermining the precarious state of health of the majority of our peoples".

Why did the Assistant Secretary of State for Hemisphere Affairs oppose Cuban cooperation in medical research on West Nile Virus, a virus that poses a threat to the hemisphere, when such cooperation could be, let's say, the first step towards cooperation in other medical areas currently prohibited by the embargo's absurd regulations?

These are questions that United States public opinion and the press should ask themselves in trying to explain the Assistant Secretary's strange conduct.

So, why do we think Mr. Reich is acting like this? For three reasons. We think there are at least three reasons that might explain his schizophrenic obsession with Cuba and his unrelenting campaign of accusations and lies against our country.

First, Mr. Otto Reich is worried about his job. He's trying to look good to the Cuban extremist groups in Miami, who we know are influential, who we know can swing elections one way or the other. Perhaps Mr. Reich is thinking about how he desperately needs the support of those extremist groups, whom he knows very well and to whom he has had ties for many years, because it's possible he may lose his job when the current session of Congress ends.

So, first of all, he's worried about his job. Will he have to return to his old job as a lobbyist for Bacardi? Perhaps. Only time will tell. That's one reason: worry about his job, the need to look good, to look tough to the extremist terrorist groups of Cuban origin that are still busily carrying on their activities, without hindrance or restriction, in southern Florida.

Second, we think Mr. Reich is afraid of the future. He's trying to muddy the bilateral relationship, to add new elements of confrontation and tension, at a time when there are increasingly clear calls from United States society, businessmen, the press and a majority of Cuban Americans for a change in United States policy towards Cuba and for the normalization of relations. He's trying desperately and hastily to defy a trend that everyone knows is unstoppable. He's afraid of the future. He can't imagine how he's going to live without being at war with Cuba, at war with peaceful coexistence and normal cooperative relations between our peoples.

Third, we think Mr. Reich is acting like this because he's desperate. Not only is he worried about his job, not only is he afraid of the future, he's desperate. He's living proof of the desperation of those minority extremist groups of Cuban origin who see that they are losing ground, losing influence, that no one buys into their old game anymore, just as no one believes anymore that they are raising money in Miami and passing the hat so that they can come and liberate Cuba.

That's because people know they have blood on their hands, that they were responsible for the murder of a young Italian tourist here in Havana, that they planted explosives, that they machine-gunned civilian installations in Cuba, that they were responsible for blowing up a civil aircraft and killing dozens of young people. No one believes them anymore and United States society is fed up with their pressures and their electoral corruption. They're losing ground, they're desperate, and Mr. Reich, who has been tied to these groups by an umbilical cord for years, is living proof of their desperation. That's why we think this is happening again.

So, in conclusion, I wish to, first, reiterate Cuba's categorical denial of Mr. Reich's false accusations; second, ask him once again to present evidence for his accusations; and, third, state our belief that what we have here is a crude, crass, superficial and irresponsible manoeuvre, and that we are entitled to expect a minimum degree of responsibility from a senior State Department official.

Were it not for his shady past and his close ties to the corrupt extremist groups that have encouraged him and to whom he owes his current appointment, Mr. Reich might perhaps have visited our research centres.

Were it not for that, Mr. Reich might one day have stopped for a cup of coffee on a visit to one of those research centres of ours that have earned international prestige for the lives they have saved and the medical products they have developed and continue to develop, which have raised the hopes of millions of families. But Mr. Reich may be going to retire or change jobs without being able to visit those centres, unlike a growing number of United States and other delegations that have done so recently.

Unfortunately for him, he won't be able to talk to scientists over a cup of coffee as President Carter did, or as other groups or as journalists from various United States media have done.

Lastly, I think I should send a warning through you to Mr. Otto Reich, Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs, that if he doesn't present any evidence within two or three days of my speaking here to you, his nose will grow like Pinocchio's and he won't be able to say we didn't warn him.

That's what I have to say. I apologize for taking up your time with these idiocies, this foolishness, but we have a duty and a responsibility to our people and to public opinion. Does anyone have any questions?

Carlos Diaz, Agence France Presse: I remember that Mr. Burton created a similar situation late last May and Cuba responded directly by saying that all its biotechnology centres were open to inspection by experts, subject to prior coordination with the Cuban authorities. That was also before Carter's visit. Does that invitation still stand?

Foreign Minister: Cuba has absolutely no problem with opening the doors to its research centres, as it has been doing and as has been happening.

Everyday, we receive delegations; every month, dozens of delegations come and visit those centres. Many of them come from the United States, although it must be said that, recently, the United States Government has tightened its restrictions and is not allowing delegations of American scientists and academics to visit Cuba.

There are tighter restrictions on authorizing such delegations to come to Cuba and the United States Government has also taken a harder line on visas for Cuban scientists to visit its country. In fact, over a hundred visa applications for Cuban scientists and academics have been turned down in recent months, preventing scientific exchanges between the two countries; this is another consequence of Mr. Reich's obsessions and phobias.

Cuba has absolutely no problem with opening its research centres — it routinely receives delegations from all over the world who visit its centres, look over the facilities, hold congresses — and the issue seemed to have been laid to rest until Mr. Reich, like a latter-day Dr. Frankenstein, revived it yesterday and started using and manipulating it again.

Of course, Mr. Reich isn't invited to visit our centres. He hasn't behaved well.